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North Texas Daily

Serving the University of North Texas & Denton since 1916

Arts & Life

Blocktober Party is smashing start to 31 Days of Halloween

Crowds gather to watch the annual Pumpkin Drop at Denton's Blocktober Party on Oct. 1, 2025. **Photo by Caitlin Goodsell**

By Sophia Carbajal
Senior Arts & Life Writer

Along the metal fences surrounding the Pumpkin Drop Zone in the parking lot of the Denton Civic Center, the crowd counted down from five. As the crowd reached one, a pumpkin sped toward the white tarp laid out on the ground.

With a loud splat, it exploded on impact into orange chunks and bright orange chalk powder that filled the air. The crowd watched on Oct. 1 as Mayor Gerard Hudspeth dropped five pumpkins from a fire truck ladder suspended 50 feet in the air.

"The height offered a great vantage point to see all of the enthusiastic faces below," Hudspeth said. "The pumpkins aren't too heavy, but the moment you release it from above, you hear a communal cheer when it smashes into the ground. It's an honor to be a part of an event that purely captures the fun, quirky spirit of Denton."

This explosion was part of the Blocktober Party and Pumpkin Drop event, which marked the start of a month-long Halloween celebration. The event took place from 6 to 8 p.m. and featured a variety of ways for the Denton community to engage in the Halloween season.

Those attending could enjoy the opening of a 5,000-square-foot haunted maze and participate in kids' activities, including bounce houses and a Touch-A-Truck event featuring Denton police and fire departments.

People closest to the Pumpkin Drop Zone were given clear ponchos to protect themselves from the colorful food explosions. Before each pumpkin dropped, the crowd was given hints and encouraged to guess what food was inside. Each of the 15, 20-pound pumpkins was filled with a different food or material, like sliced peaches, ketchup, pickles, green peas, creamed corn, chocolate syrup and green slime.

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Sports

Previewing North Texas football's matchup against No. 24 South Florida

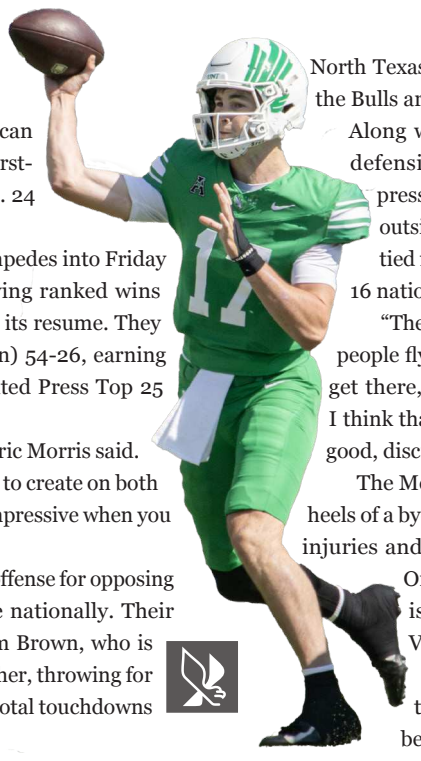

Photo by Katie Brackens

By Ian Pfaffenberger
Staff Writer

North Texas football (5-0, 1-0 American Conference) will face its hardest test in its first-ranked opponent yet on Oct. 10, as the No. 24 South Florida Bulls come to Denton.

South Florida (4-1, 1-0 American) stampedes into Friday in the midst of a declarative season, having ranked wins against Florida and Boise State already on its resume. They recently beat Charlotte (1-4, 0-2 American) 54-26, earning the No. 24 ranking in this week's Associated Press Top 25 College Football Poll.

"They're creating havoc," head coach Eric Morris said. "I just think that the havoc that they're able to create on both sides of the ball is something that's really impressive when you turn on [the film]."

South Florida boasts an overwhelming offense for opposing defenses, ranking No. 33 in total offense nationally. Their system is led by senior quarterback Byrum Brown, who is currently the team's leading passer and rusher, throwing for 211 yards, rushing for 162 and scoring five total touchdowns against Charlotte.

"What impresses me when you watch it is just the way he's able to get out of trouble," Morris said. "[He turns] what should be maybe a sack into a 13 or 14 yard gain, keeping the chains moving and allowing them to utilize their tempo. We're gonna have to do a great job finding ways to get him on the ground."

The Bulls' defense has contributed to their success as well, ranking seventh in the nation in turnovers gained along with North Texas. After forcing four against Charlotte, the Bulls are riding a 13-game turnover streak.

Along with their turnovers, South Florida's defensive line has been able to generate pressure on opposing quarterbacks. Senior outside linebacker Mac Harris currently sits tied for fourth in the American and tied No. 16 nationally in total sacks at four.

"They're aggressive," Morris said. "There's people flying around the ball. I think once they get there, they get there with an attitude. [...] I think that's a product, usually, of guys playing good, disciplined football."

The Mean Green head into the match on the heels of a bye week, which allowed them to remedy injuries and have an extra week of preparation.

One player they won't get back, however, is senior defensive lineman Fatafehi Vailea II.

Vailea, who was named one of the team's captains and a starter at the beginning of the season, suffered a lower leg injury against Army (2-3, 1-2) and has been officially declared out for the rest of the season. Senior Will Jones II said the absence of one of their veteran pieces is large but he is also confident in the backups behind him.

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News

The university held a topping off ceremony for the new Science and Technology building on Oct. 3, 2025 with the building scheduled to be finished around January of next year. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

New building reaches construction milestone

By Kyson Barber
Staff Writer

The university held a topping-off ceremony for the new Science and Technology Building on Oct. 3, marking a milestone in the ongoing project and celebrating the placement of the final steel beam before the facility's completion next year.

The anticipated 111,000-square-foot building, with a scheduled completion date of around Jan. 27, 2026, will provide new multidisciplinary research spaces on campus and is designed to bring together multiple areas of study under one roof.

University President Harrison Keller and other administrators gathered with representatives from companies Smithgroup and Skanska at the ceremony.

"It represents how committed we are as a top-tier research institution to bring together new knowledge and insights," Keller said in his ceremony speech. "[The building] transcends traditional academic disciplines."

The project is funded through a $113 million tuition revenue bond authorized by the Texas Legislature in 2021. Of that amount, $103.4 million was initially allocated for the Science and Technology Building when the project was announced.

However, documents from the August university Board of Regents meeting list the project's budget as approved by the board at $109.1 million, remaining below the total bond authorization.

Tuition revenue bonds like the Science and Technology Building are legally restricted to the project named in the legislation, meaning the funds must be spent on construction, site preparation, design, equipping or other costs directly tied to the project.

Misusing any portion for unrelated projects or operations could trigger state audits or legal action, though expenses such as utility work, planning, furnishings and infrastructure connected to the facility are typically permitted. As of Oct. 7, the remaining estimated 4 million funds from the approved budget are not publicly available online.

The ceremony had five speakers, including Keller, Pamela Padilla, the vice president of research and innovation, SmithGroup representative Patrick Jones, Skanska representative Abhi Kulkarni and Skanska Superintendent Gregory Houle.

The new building, situated at the southwest corner of West Mulberry Street and Avenue C, is expected to feature modern laboratories, clinical spaces, and technology-equipped rooms that support a wide range of research and teaching.

"Showcase and provide access to the innovative research in the building, and then connect to the amazing campus and the science and technology area developed here [...] This is just another stepping stone in that," Houle said.

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North Texas Daily

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Science and Technology Building completion expected January 2026, months ahead of schedule

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Padilla said the facility will serve several colleges, including the College of Science, the College of Engineering and the College of Health and Public Service. Bringing these programs together under one roof is intended to create more opportunities for cross-disciplinary work and joint projects.

The building's design will place research labs and clinical areas in proximity, which Padilla said will facilitate collaboration more easily and effectively.

Researchers working in separate but related fields will be able to share space, resources and expertise, creating what administrators said they hope will be a more dynamic environment for students and faculty alike.

"A lot of projects now within science require multi-disciplinary [research]," Padilla said. "[...] so bringing all those folks all together in one space is going to be productive."

During his speech, Keller implied that the new five-year strategic plan, which will be announced at his State of the University address on Nov. 5, included a focus on the building's development.

"We'll be rolling out our new five-year strategic plan for the university, including our emphasis on research development and innovation," Keller said.

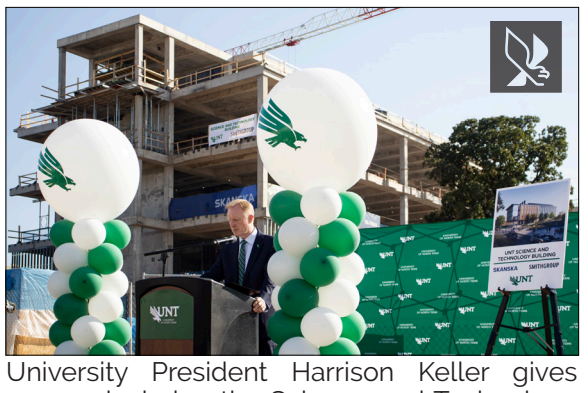
The facility is a part of the "R1 Our Way" plan, laid out by Provost's Office leadership, which states that expanding research infrastructure is critical to moving the university from the lower quartile into the middle half of Research-1 universities.

As of 2022, the university ranked as the fourth largest in Texas, and research has grown by approximately 13 percent in the last year, Padilla said.

The project was built on the former Lot 7, removing commuter parking spaces. The commuter lot was closed last December, and the university announced an expected completion date of November 2026.

With the new expected date in January 2026, the building would be completed 10 months earlier than initially anticipated.

After the speeches, attendees, including administrators, company representatives and faculty members, signed the final steel beam before it was installed later that day.



University President Harrison Keller gives a speech during the Science and Technology Building topping off ceremony on Oct. 3, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Many of those in attendance were directly involved in the project or represented the colleges that will occupy the new building once it opens.

"The best part of, especially academic research to me, is that ability that it touches campus," Jones said. "[...] students can see what the possibilities are and what they're going to be learning."

New LEAPH program launches, provides space for interdisciplinary projects

By Shehzil Imran
News Editor

The College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences recently launched the Lab for Engaged, Applied, and Public Humanities, aiming to provide a space for students, faculty and community members to develop skills through interdisciplinary projects.

The lab, located in room 370 of the Environmental Education, Science, and Technology Building, provides a conference space and a separate, soundproofed podcast room equipped with facilities such as a greenscreen and cameras. The equipment was primarily relocated from the Advanced Humanities Lab, with additional contributions from other humanities departments.

The launch of LEAPH comes after the finalization of the humanities department's new Digital Humanities Certificate for the fall 2026 curriculum, according to Jennifer Wallach, CLASS divisional dean of humanities and history professor.

"I would say it's been a dream for a long time [...]," Wallach said. "We haven't had a lot of resources, but we've had a lot of heart and energy and excitement. Our big resources are people, and we've had people that really have worked hard to make this happen."

Jakob Burnham, clinical assistant professor of history and LEAPH director, said the lab is meant to facilitate building research projects that serve the North Texas area beyond the university.

While LEAPH has an emphasis on the humanities, the space and its projects are open to anyone across all fields, as the program promotes cross-department collaboration.

"Every department, every major, everyone in the world can benefit from their greater engagement with the humanities and how the humanities helps you answer questions [...]," Burnham said.

LEAPH, announced on Sept. 24, currently supports three main research projects: the Texas Animal Humanities Project, the Milpa Agricultural Placemaking Project and Neuro-Narratives.

The newest of the three projects, Neuro-Narratives, is led by Sara Park, an assistant professor in the Department of Rehabilitation & Health Services, and Kimberly Grey, an assistant professor of creative writing.

The project focuses on creating an archive of stories, viewpoints and experiences from neurodiverse people beyond medical research.

"I'm interested in stories that are underappreciated, underknown, undertold [...]," Wallach said. "I feel like we hear so much about autism and neurodiversity from people who are not autistic or neurodiverse. I think we have a big opportunity to add these voices to the conversation, and I'm excited about it [...]."

Assistant history professor Greta Swain said one of LEAPH's goals is to help bridge departmental boundaries by supporting and encouraging cross-disciplinary work.

The lab's projects focus on two central humanities certifications, Medical Humanities and Digital Humanities, which are part of LEAPH's initiatives to train students with workforce-ready skills and drive engagement with public and applied humanities within and outside the classroom.

"Digital Humanities is [...], by nature, a very collaborative and interdisciplinary field, and is thus a great fit with the work that LEAPH is trying to do," Swain said in an email to the *North Texas Daily*.

The Digital Humanities Certificate received approval from the CLASS Undergraduate Curriculum Committee on Sept. 10.

Although the certificate will not be offered until next fall, students can begin fulfilling its course requirements in the spring, utilizing the LEAPH lab resources and equipment.

"[...] I think that it's important to have the spaces [with this equipment] so that students can not only use them, but learn how to use them," said Madison Black, Texas A&M alumna and LEAPH graduate student assistant. "I wasn't super digital, especially in my undergrad work, and that's what used to scare me the most going into graduate school and moving into the career space."

Graduate assistant Madison Black gives a tour inside the Lab for Engaged, Applied, and Public Humanities on Oct. 6, 2025. **Photo by Aiden Gonzalez**

An instance of LEAPH combining humanities research with digital platforms is through the Texas Animal Humanities Project. It focuses on the history and relationships between humans and wild animals.

Throughout the summer, university graduate student and history department research assistant Dusty Rhoads created an "online museum" as part of his research with TXAH. Rhoads' research delves into the history of the native Texas horned lizard, also known as "horny toads," and their impact on the environment.

"I was like, 'Oh my gosh, there's a need right there,' because [...] Texans love horny toads, it's as symbolic of Texas as cowboy hats and blue bonnets," Rhoads said. "[...] It's a little scary [putting my research out online], but it puts your name out there pretty quick, and gets people interested. It fosters an environment of collaboration rather than competition."

The third main LEAPH project, MAPP, is led by Michael Wise, director of horticulture and associate history professor, and Sandra Mendiola García, oral history director and associate history professor.

Through MAPP, students create edible landscapes, make oral histories on food culture/history and grow and donate crops on campus. In promotion of the project, the lab passed out free sprouted seedlings to attendees at LEAPH's official launch.

"The MAPP project, the Milpa project, is all about making the campus better for people, and greener," said Sofia Stevens-Garcia, Milpa Agricultural Placemaking Project operations coordinator and university senior. "And also through the oral histories, we are creating an archive for future use of history in North Texas and of the diversity of people who live here and eat here and cook here."

The lab's official hours are 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday, 12:30-4 p.m. on Tuesday, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday and 12-4 p.m. on Friday.

Students who wish to book the lab or require access to the space outside of the designated hours can email LEAPH@unt.edu to request accommodations.

University named best in nation for federal depository website

By Diego Hernandez
Deputy News Editor

The United States Government Publishing Office named the university's Federal Depository Library Program website the best in the country for 2025, an honor that places the university among only three institutions nationwide to receive the recognition.

Since its launch, the site has logged more than 50 million visits, making it the library system's most accessed digital resource and one of the most visited public information tools in Texas due to its availability to the public for government files.

"People often think government documents just mean laws or congressional hearings," said Betty Monterroso, university government information technical services coordinator. "But we have everything, including cookbooks, posters, maps and music scores. We call ourselves a library within the library."

The university joined the FDLP in 1948, more than a century after Congress created the network in 1813 to distribute government publications to libraries across the U.S.

The goal of the program is to ensure people in every congressional district have free access to federal records, according to the GPO website. Bobby Griffith, university lead government information reference associate, said the work extends this mission by focusing on preservation, public use and education.

"The government wants information available to the public," Griffith said. "We are a steward of that collection, so we preserve, catalog and provide access to documents that range from congressional reports to World War II manuals."

The university's federal documents collection now includes more than 500,000 physical records, many of which have been digitized for online access.

The U.S. Government Publishing Office recognized the university's Federal Depository Library Program website as the best in the nation, making it one of only three institutions across the country to receive this honor. **Photo by Maria Arellano**

The U.S. GPO announced the award on Sept. 25, highlighting the university's leadership in preserving public records and expanding access to information.

"UNT Libraries is a trailblazer in digital preservation and a partner GPO is beyond lucky to have," said Scott Matheson, GPO superintendent of documents, in the press release. "We thank them for their long-standing contribution to helping GPO deliver on its vision of an America informed."

However, the scope of the archive goes beyond legislative materials. The library houses Smokey Bear activity kits, board games created by NASA, coloring books distributed by federal agencies and even theatrical "Blueprint Specials," full musical productions written for soldiers serving in World War II.

Those shows include scripts, sheet music and set designs that the university has digitized to reduce handling and preserve their condition.

The library's transition from physical storage to online access began between 1994 and 1996, Griffith and Monterroso said, when the university became one of the first institutions in the country to act as a federal information portal, according to Monterroso.

The website, with only a few categorized links at the time, evolved into a detailed, searchable platform that organizes records into subject guides, curated digital collections and annotated indexes.

Griffith manages many of those guides and writes for "Sycamore Stacks," a blog dedicated to exploring government records. The blog delves into the stories behind various materials, from historic posters to recipes published by federal agencies and illustrates how government information intersects with everyday life.

The library also operates the CyberCemetery, a digital archive that preserves defunct federal websites so they remain accessible for research and public reference.

"Over the years, we have expanded what we offer as technology allows," Monterroso said. "Today, the site serves as an easy-access gateway to federal information across multiple agencies."

The website now connects users to more than a dozen specialized digital collections, including the Government Accountability Office Reports, a comprehensive catalog of government-published comics and an A-to-Z digitization project of federal documents.

Many of these records are in the public domain, allowing artists, teachers and researchers to download and reuse them freely.

Griffith said requests for high-resolution versions of materials, particularly World War II propaganda posters, are among the most frequent inquiries received.

As a Preservation Steward in the FDLP, the library's role involves ensuring that at least four physical copies of essential government documents remain stored at libraries across the United States.

Materials are obtained directly from federal agencies, purchased by the university or donated by other libraries. Once received, staff catalog them and prepare them for long-term preservation, often digitizing them to expand public access.

Monterroso stated that the collection is available to the public without any connection to the university and emphasized the importance of preserving and making the information accessible.

"We are connecting people to information that shapes their understanding of government, history and society," Monterroso said.

After receiving the national award, the staff turned their attention to improving the site's accessibility.

One major project currently underway involves redesigning subject guides and online navigation tools to make them more intuitive for users, particularly people with disabilities. The redesign is expected to be completed by April 2026.

The Wall Street Journal names Texas Woman's University a leading public university in North Texas

By Diego Hernandez
Deputy News Editor

Texas Woman's University was ranked among the nation's top 500 colleges by the Wall Street Journal for 2026, placing second in the North Texas area and seventh among public universities in Texas.

The annual ranking, which measures student experience, career preparation and return on investment, offers a snapshot of how well universities support students during and after college, from graduation outcomes to long-term career success.

"This recognition reflects Texas Woman's pioneering spirit — opportunity paired with excellence, grit matched with grace," TWU Chancellor Carine Feyten said in an emailed statement to the *North Texas Daily*. "Our graduates carry that spirit forward as leaders in their professions and communities, improving the well-being of their families and of society at large."

The University of North Texas ranked just under TWU at third in the North Texas area.

The WSJ ranking evaluates 584 four-year institutions and was developed and executed in collaboration with research partners College Pulse and Statista.

That category includes metrics such as student outcomes, diversity, cost and returns and individual survey results that include learning opportunities, preparation for a career, learning facilities and recommendation score.

According to TWU's 2024–2025 Fact Book, TWU enrolls just over 15,400 students across its Denton, Dallas and Houston campuses. More than 10,000 of those students are undergraduates. The six-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time students is 44.2 percent.

The one-year retention rate for first-time students is reported at 73.8 percent, and TWU's Common Data Set shows a retention rate of 69.55 percent for the cohort entering fall 2023 and returning in fall 2024.

"A common saying we have is, 'Educate a woman, empower the world,'" TWU Student Government President Danika Murphy said in an email to the *Daily*. "While the phrase says 'woman,' the message spans across our diverse student body."

TWU reports that more than 84 percent of graduates are employed or enrolled in graduate or professional school within one year of graduation, according to its student achievement data.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, median earnings for graduates a decade after enrolling are about $56,500.

Among North Texas institutions on the listing, the University of Texas at Arlington ranked first regionally, while Princeton University topped the national rankings overall. Combining public and private institutions, TWU ranked third after Texas Christian University.

Nationally, TWU was ranked 234 out of 584 with a score of 65.4 percent. UNT ranked 235 on the listing, with a score of 65.3.

TWU scored 74 percent in salary impact and 25 percent in the graduation rate. UNT, in contrast, scored 66 percent in salary impact and 50 percent in graduation rate. Diversity was scored at 93 percent for TWU and 82 percent for UNT.

For the individual survey results for TWU, learning opportunities were ranked 65 percent, career preparation was 67 percent, learning facilities were 80 percent, and lastly, the recommendation scores were 73 percent.

"Each student here is capable of succeeding, and the university is geared towards ensuring that academic goals are attained," Murphy said. "In the Student Government Association, for example, our organization has a GPA of 3.53 collectively."

UNT, however, scored 66 percent for learning opportunities, 67 percent for preparation for a career, 76 percent for learning facilities and 72 percent for recommendation score.

Texas Woman's University was ranked among the nation's top 500 colleges by the Wall Street Journal for 2025. **Photo by Katie Brackens**

The WSJ ranking found the average net price for TWU to be $10,948, and $29,969 for the value added to graduate salary. The study found the average time to pay off the net price was one year and five months.

For UNT, the average net price was $14,352, $30,957 for value added to graduate salary and lastly approximately a year and ten months to pay off the net price.

TWU's recognition comes amid ongoing institutional goals to improve student success and degree completion. In its Strategic Plan, approved in October 2023, the university outlined a goal to raise its six-year graduation rate to 65 percent by 2028 through expanded academic support services, advising and student engagement initiatives.

Last year, TWU ranked fifth among public institutions of higher learning in Texas, according to the WSJ, and was ranked seventh in 2023.

"At TWU, we are proud, but humble, to receive the honor of being ranked a top choice among the nation's 4,000+ four-year colleges and universities," Murphy said.

‘It’s authentically Denton:’ Blocktober Party and Pumpkin Drop starts month long festivities

BLOCKTOBER continued from page 1

A pumpkin splatters on the ground as the crowd cheers during Denton's Blocktober Party on Oct. 1, 2025. **Photo by Caitlin Goodsell**

At the end of the pumpkin drop, the once white tarp was a colorful, wet and sticky mess of pumpkin innards. Kayla Herrod, a McKinney resident and the city’s deputy director of marketing and communications, said the pumpkin fillings were intentionally picked.

“We wanted to pick items that would really make a splash,” Herrod said. “Last year, we tested out different fillings to see how they’d look when dropped, and adjusted based on what worked best in reality.”

Last year, Denton celebrated the spooky season with the city’s first-ever 31 Days of Halloween event. According to the city, the month-long celebration attracted over 660,000 visitors to its more than 200 programs and events. The Texas Legislature designated Denton as the Halloween Capital of Texas during its 89th session in November 2024, a title that will remain in effect for 10 years.

Herrod said the 31 Days of Halloween events highlight Denton’s creative and tight-knit community and that the Pumpkin Drop showcases the city’s “spirit.”

“In a short amount of time, Denton Halloween has drawn hundreds of thousands of people to our community from all over the country, and even internationally, so we wanted to start the month with something that brings the community together,” Herrod said.

Those attending the Blocktober Party and Pumpkin Drop event could also interact and learn about dozens of local businesses and organizations. The Denton Civic Center was crowded with people of all ages, lining up to speak with community members.

Chris Uzzle, a UNT Dallas alumnus and the president of The North Texas Ghostbusters — a Denton-based nonprofit that formed in 2020 — attended the Halloween celebration with 10 other members dressed in full “Ghostbusters” (1984) gear.

Uzzle said his main goal is to give back to the community and help others through the organization’s love of Halloween, and of course, “Ghostbusters.”

“‘Ghostbusters’ just spoke to me,” Uzzle said. “It’s a group of guys that came together and were friends, but were also working against the odds and people not believing them, and yet they were still able to save the world.”

The North Texas Ghostbusters have partnered with local businesses and donated to charities like The North Texas Food Bank, Autism Adventures and Toys for Tots. Uzzle said the group plans to become its own charity organization in the future.

“We have a lot of fun, but we’re also able to give back from being able to engage with the community here, especially Denton during the 31 Days of Halloween,” Uzzle said. “Just being able to have families and kiddos come up, little kids that you wouldn’t expect would know the ‘Ghostbusters,’ and they know the ‘Ghostbusters.’”

Uzzle said this year has been one of the organization’s busiest years. Before October even started, Uzzle said the group had participated in over 20 events and plans to attend many more in Denton’s 31 Days of Halloween.

Hudspeth said the Blocktober Party and Pumpkin Drop is just one of almost 300 events planned throughout October, including the Day of the Dead Coffin Races, an event that Hudspeth said he is most looking forward to. Hudspeth said the energy Denton staff, local businesses and artists put into 31 Days of Halloween is an inspiring testament to the creative and chaotic celebrations.

“As the official Halloween Capital of Texas, all of our events tell the world one thing: Denton is the center of creativity and collaboration,” Hudspeth said. “It’s a shared experience built by city staff, local artists and small business owners working hand-in-hand. It’s authentically Denton, and we invite everyone to come feel the magic this month has to offer.”

Things To Do:

UNT Football vs. South Florida

When: Friday, Oct. 10 at 6:30 p.m.
Where: DATCU Stadium, 1251 Bonnie Brae St.
What: North Texas football will take on South Florida at DATCU Stadium Friday night in a nationally televised game with major American Conference implications. The game will be broadcast on ESPN2.

Hannah Goodwin Goodbye Denton Concert

When: Friday, Oct. 10 at 7:30 p.m.
Where: Steves Wine Bar, 111 Industrial St.
What: Hannah Goodwin, a 23-year-old pianist and songwriter who just graduated from the university, studied under Jennifer Barnes and Rosana Eckert. To celebrate the upcoming release of her debut album “Hannah Claire,” she is going on a special tour around the Dallas–Fort Worth area. This performance will showcase original music from her debut album.

Debunking Ghost Stories Using Research

When: Saturday, Oct. 11 at 1 p.m.
Where: Emily Fowler Central Library, 502 Oakland St.
What: Hosted by Black Fox Brewing Company of Texas, music lovers are invited to hear live jazz from a 5-piece eclectic jazz band composed of 2 dueling saxophones, guitar, bass and drums. The show is free to attend, but purchase of any alcohol will require a valid ID.

Shiloh Garden hosts its first-ever pumpkin festival, blending Halloween fun with gardening

By Rebecca Hsu
Staff Writer

Attendee Donald Henry selects a pumpkin from the patch during the Shiloh Field Community Garden's pumpkin festival on Oct. 4, 2025. **Photo by Dilip Devanda**

As visitors of all ages weaved through the Shiloh Field Community Garden, they passed by rows of zucchini, sweet potatoes and yellow squash. As the hayride they were on rolled along, children waved to chickens clucking inside their coop, the children’s laughter echoing throughout the garden.

The garden, located on Nottingham Drive near Mingo Road, hosted its first-ever pumpkin festival on Saturday, Oct. 4. The event was part of Denton’s 31 Days of Halloween. It featured a pumpkin patch, scarecrows with pumpkin heads, hayrides and other family-friendly activities.

Christina Proctor, a volunteer operating the event and board president of Friends of Shiloh Garden, the nonprofit organization that operates the garden, said the event was a great opportunity for people to learn about what the garden has to offer.

“We are kind of hidden,” Proctor said. “People drive by us every day and never knew that we were back here, so I’m glad that they’re getting more awareness in the community about what we have here, and hopefully they will come back on a Saturday or a weekday and come and volunteer with us, or even just take a tour.”

In 2011, businessman and gardener Gene Gumfory founded the Shiloh Garden, aiming to help combat food insecurity in the Denton area. Since its establishment, the garden has been donating its harvest to local food banks and nonprofit organizations.

Proctor said the garden currently has 17 local partners. The garden provides them with fresh foods such as eggs and vegetables.

“It’s become really important,” Proctor said. “Especially since COVID, there’s been more and more people kind of struggling with food insecurities. And you know, with the grocery prices rising so high now, it’s just even harder to get the simple things that you need, and so having us grow here, we’re donating hundreds of pounds a week to the food banks of in-season produce.”

Rhonda McKinzie, a four-year volunteer with the Shiloh Garden and a Denton County Master Gardener, said volunteers assist with various tasks around the plots.

“We do everything,” McKinzie said. “We plant. We weed. We harvest. There’s all kinds of things.”

The pumpkin festival took place from 3 to 7 p.m., featuring live music and several Halloween-themed photo opportunities. The event also included a variety of booths offering food and drinks, face painting and information about plants and sustainability.

One of the booths was selling homemade canned goods, from berry jam and beans to spaghetti sauce and pickled jalapenos.

Shiloh Garden volunteer Christie Wood, who made these canned goods, said they were all prepared using extra produce from the garden.

“I can tell you exactly which plants some of these jellies came from, because I work right over there,” Wood said.

Wood said that she has been canning at home for 50 years, following instructions from a 1943 guidebook. She started canning for the Shiloh Garden last year to fundraise for the organization.

“I use the same methods that were used with the Victory Gardens in World War II,” Wood said. “Same recipes, same canning timetables. [...] I have never had anything spoil or go bad. So yes, you follow the old-fashioned recipe, you’ll be fine.”

Another booth at the event was selling drinks like warm apple cider and sodas.

Proctor said that all proceeds from the festival will go to Rotary International’s PolioPlus program, an effort to eradicate polio worldwide. She said that Rotary has supported the garden for years, and the festival was an excellent opportunity for collaboration and giving back.

Varina Lavelle, a university alumna and Denton resident, said the pumpkin festival was a fantastic community event.

“I think it’s a great community effort,” Lavelle said. “I’m glad to see as many people as are here, and I hope it continues to grow.”

Proctor said that people who wish to get involved with the garden can visit Shiloh Garden’s website for more information. The garden welcomes individuals, families and large groups.

“We’re super excited to have our name out in the community as something that people can come out and volunteer,” Proctor said. “And we would love to have you.”

45 years later, Denton Arts and Jazz Festival provides 'sense of community'

By Caitlyn Ybarra
Staff Writer

On a sunny October weekend, Quakertown Park was transformed into one of the community's biggest events, free for the public to attend. Marking the 45th anniversary of the Denton Arts and Jazz Festival, art exhibits and vendors lined the area, with music surrounding attendees at every corner.

Debbie Sims, president and chair of community development for the festival, enjoys all the festivities but said she believes the family involvement and inclusivity brought by the three-day event are her favorite aspects.

While the exact number is not available due to a lack of tracking methods, Sims estimated that approximately 50,000 to 60,000 attended the event.

"All the artists love coming in and displaying their arts and selling their goodies and their jewelry, but for the music, people come and bring their chairs-they stay all weekend," Sims said. "They start reserving their seats with charts on Wednesday, before we start on Friday."

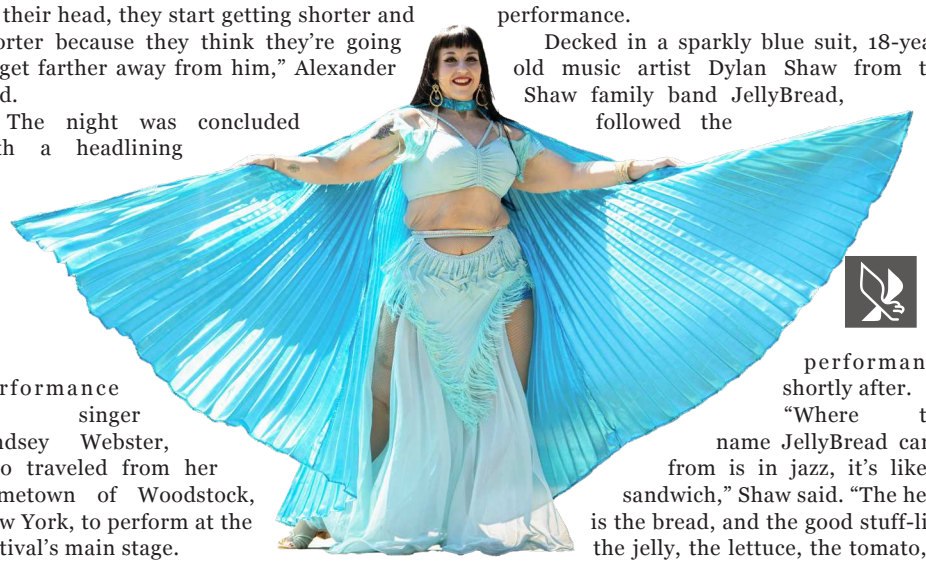


Photo by Ismael Beltran

Day 1: Friday, Oct. 3

Kicking off the event, a diverse palette of performers took to the stage.

Some young performers were led by Cheree Barnette, a music teacher and director for Tamba Marimba, a xylophone group for fifth graders that hopes to instill discipline and appreciation for music.

"Being a musician teaches life skills," Barnette said. "Regardless of how old you are, there's things that they're going to apply and be self-motivated."

Perched upon a large wooden stick, a 28-year-old blue-throated macaw named Tico bopped and swayed along to the different tunes. Tico's owner, Sam Alexander, said his winged friend enjoyed the festival and taking photos with other attendees, even when some became timid.

"A lot of people are really scared of him, and I'll put him on some people, and when I put him on their head, they start getting shorter and shorter because they think they're going to get farther away from him," Alexander said.

Photo by Dilip Devanda

The night was concluded with a headlining performance by singer Lindsey Webster, who traveled from her hometown of Woodstock, New York, to perform at the festival's main stage.

With a lively stage presence and soulful vocals, Webster performed as dancers swayed through the grassy field.

Webster played a mix of originals and well-known classics, such as "Over the Rainbow" (1939) and Michael Bublé's "Feeling Good" (2005). Webster described herself as a "silver linings person," which was evident through her blend of charisma and upbeat songs.

Day 2: Saturday, Oct. 4

Despite the sun beating down, the second day of the festival proved to be as vibrant and action-packed as the first, with Dylan Triplett, a blues and soul prodigy from East St. Louis, headlining.

Denton resident and belly dancer Laura Morgaine performed, capturing the attention of one toddler audience member in particular, who came to hug her midway through the performance.

Decked in a sparkly blue suit, 18-year-old music artist Dylan Shaw from the Shaw family band JellyBread, followed the performance shortly after.

"Where the name JellyBread came from is in jazz, it's like a sandwich," Shaw said. "The head is the bread, and the good stuff-like the jelly, the lettuce, the tomato, is like the improvisation."

Shaw and JellyBread performed for the fourth year at the festival, musically improvising parts of their performance.

"My favorite part about it is just entertaining the people and connecting through them for music," Shaw said. "This band is to provide people some joy and some entertainment through healing. [...] the blues is about [...] just lifting up people's spirits and souls."

Over at the UNT Jazz Stage, each group within the university's jazz program got the chance to perform over the weekend.

Jazz studies junior John Nasto from the university's Paschall Combo group said playing at the festival differed from a campus performance.

"I think it adds another layer of pressure because you've got not just your friends in the audience, you've got people's parents and whoever else that came out to support, so it also makes it more fun," Nasto said. "It's cool to see a huge crowd of people come and support."

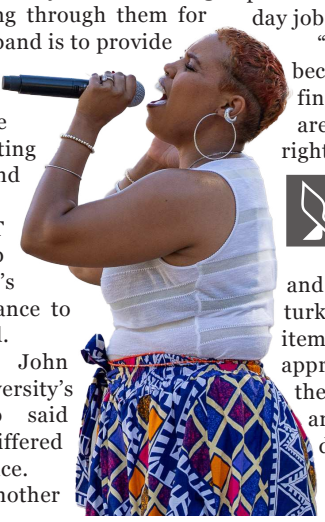


Photo by Charles Farmer

Denton resident and attendee Dilana King said she enjoyed the varying performances on day two of the festival and described what the vibe of the festival would be like for someone's first time in the audience.

"For someone who hasn't attended, I think it would be not overwhelming, but exciting," King said. "For Denton to do something like this, and I've lived here my whole life, it's really exciting to me."

The day also included another opportunity for artists and vendors to showcase their work and interact with attendees.

Grapevine resident Kevin Perkins, an owner of Anarque Woodworks, traced his craftsmanship roots back to a music-related origin.

"I was an apprentice to my grandfather as a child, and I started working with him when I was four," Perkins said. "We were making musical instruments in his woodshop, and I've been making wooden things ever since."

Inside the Denton Senior Center, Plano resident and Evolution Rose owner Cody Sherman showcased his delicately crafted roses, made from tiny seashells.

The roses themself were a piece of art that provided a contrast to the work of Sherman's day job as a construction worker.

"[The roses] are about six hours to do because the smaller I go, the harder it is to find shells," Sherman said. "[The petals] are so tight, and I have to find exactly the right shell to fit all the way around."

Day 3: Sunday, Oct. 5

Throughout the weekend, sweet and savory aromas filled the air, with turkey legs being a frequently purchased item. A worker from TC Corn said they sold approximately 300 to 400 turkey legs over the festival. Like the event's art collection and atmosphere, the food options were diverse.

Headliners for Sunday, Brave Combo, a genre-bending polka-fusion band, returned to their annual post, as they have performed at the jazz fest since it began.

Taylor Alexandria Hayden, an author and owner of Grimm's Toys, a business that creates quirky repurposed stuffed animals, said she appreciated the festival's atmosphere.

"It's at a park and it's jazz music," Hayden said. "We're not listening to heavy metal or something. It fits the time of the year."

With rainbow-dyed hair and tie-dyed clothes, Bedford resident and annual attendee Kristina Heyen could be found twirling rainbow ribbons and spinning hula hoops during some of the day's musical performances.

Heyen said she believes what made the festival so special was the fun people had and the space to be their "best selves."

"There's just so much authenticity that walks through this area here, and I think that's really what stands out the most," Heyen said.

Heyen shared her props with fellow attendees and children, which demonstrated her belief that the festival represented unity and a sense of community.

"Getting to spend time and share space with people in this community means so much to me," Heyen said. "I love Denton so much, and it feels like there's a powerful sense of community here that I cherish so deeply and think is an important human experience."

June Berry, Denton resident and president of the Denton Woman's Club, also emphasized how the festival connects to the community, even years after its founding.

"[Visitors] can come here free, and if they don't want to spend any money, they can go around, look at the exhibits, see some friends, see some new tattoos on some of the other people who come. There's always something fun," Berry said. "It's a way for anybody who just wants to go out on a pretty weekend, and I hope that doesn't change."

The UNT L5 Electric Guitar Ensemble performs during day two of the Arts & Jazz Festival at Quakertown Park on Oct. 4, 2025. **Photo by Aiden Gonzalez**

‘You don’t know the life of a showgirl, babe:’ Taylor Swift’s 12th album withers in the spotlight

By Gianna Ortner-Findlay
Editor-in-Chief

When Grammy award-winning American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift announced her newest album on August 12 during an episode of “New Heights,” a podcast co-hosted by her now-fiancé, Travis Kelce, with his brother Jason Kelce, the internet erupted.

Predictions for Swift’s 12th album, “The Life of a Showgirl,” were largely positive, with 2.7 million copies of the album selling the day of its release, Oct. 3.

A little over a year and a half after Swift’s dual-sided “The Tortured Poets Department” (2024), instead of listeners receiving a powerfully composed and well-thought-out album, listeners received some of Swift’s most disappointing lyricism in recent years. Although the self-labeled poet is well known for cleverly written lyrics transposed over pop beats, “The Life of a Showgirl” seems to have left these elements hidden behind the curtain.

Swift, who has amassed over 95 million monthly listeners on Spotify alone, opens the album with “The Fate of Ophelia,” a masterful move by Swift to lure listeners in. The song begins with piano, before giving way to the kick beat that undertones the rest of the song. Swift has long been a proponent of literary references in her songs, choosing the titular character Ophelia from “Hamlet” (1623), who infamously drowned in a river.

Ophelia, similar to in the play, is an allegorical comparison for the consequences of society’s control over women in the song. The singer reframes Ophelia’s story in “The Fate of Ophelia,” as the lover she sings to has “dug me out of my grave and/saved my heart from the fate of/Ophelia.”

The song’s music video, which has amassed nearly 20 million views on YouTube since Oct. 5, is a masterclass in set changes, showcasing a different

Illustration by Thomas Trevino

version of Ophelia as a showgirl throughout history, ending with Swift herself.

If “The Fate of Ophelia” is a tribute gone right, Swift’s second track, “Elizabeth Taylor,” is a fall from grace.

The song starts slower, with Swift asking, “Elizabeth Taylor/Do you think it’s forever?” before breaking into a moment free from overwhelming backtracking, allowing for an instance of storytelling. The beat drop and momentum of the chorus are reminiscent of “I Did Something Bad” from Swift’s sixth studio album “reputation” (2017), but this is where the comparisons stop.

While some of the moments in the chorus show Swift did her research, referencing the late starlet Elizabeth Taylor’s highs and lows in comparison to herself, the song lacks Swift’s typical lyricism. Instead of well-versed, the song comes across as rehashing a feeling of being unloved in Hollywood, a feeling the billionaire, who is coming off the highest-grossing tour in history, is no longer accustomed to.

“Opalite” is a refuge, and while some moments of the song lack the same punch as other eras from Swift, the playful beat and guitar riffs allow for the album to take a breath from its intensity thus far.

The song is positive, cracking open the positive feeling that permeates the rest of the album. Unlike track two, “Opalite” gives listeners a glimpse into a well-constructed bridge in this new era for Swift, an uncommon theme in the latter half of the album.

“Father Figure” is weak in comparison, failing to garner the gusto of an empowering ballad with mafioso elements from movies like “The Godfather” (1973). With lyrics like “I protect the family/I was your father figure” in the chorus and “I got the place surrounded/You’ll be sleeping with the fishes before you know you’re drowning” in the bridge, the song lacks the strength to take it seriously.

Swift’s fifth track, “Eldest Daughter,” is disappointing. In the song’s attempt to showcase how Swift’s need to fit in has affected her, “I have been afflicted by a terminal uniqueness/I’ve been dying just from trying to seem cool,” the lyrics come across as cringey as opposed to relatable. The slower song attempts to lean into a storytelling aspect not typical of Swift’s style, but the deviance from the norm is a leap too far off stage.

“Ruin The Friendship” is seemingly a continuation of the themes found in “So High School” (2024), but instead of feeling reminiscent, it comes across as weirdly juvenile for the 35-year-old singer.

Swift’s “Actually Romantic,” “Wi$h Li$t,” and “CANCELLED” are almost all bark and no bite, trying yet again to bring the bad girl vibes of “reputation” back to life, but failing to truly revive this feeling in the songs. The most notable among them is the sweeping diss track aimed at British singer-songwriter Charli xcx, in “Actually Romantic.”

The song focuses largely on dismissing the strength of the threats this mystery artist exudes, which feels like a feeble attempt at intimidating an artist who, if the rumors are true, has a largely different demographic than Swift anyway.

“Wood” and “Honey” are blatant attempts by Swift to be cool in an industry that is moving in a direction of music that supports music that embraces female sensuality. Swift attempts to create a raunchy play on words that younger artists Sabrina Carpenter and Olivia Rodrigo do successfully, but ultimately fails. While Swift exceeds these younger artists in some elements, in this, Swift leaves much to be desired in the third act.

The singer saves the best for last, with the title song “The Life of a Showgirl (feat. Sabrina Carpenter).” The 12th track is one of two songs on the album that truly exemplify the showgirl feel of the album, in all its glittery glory.

The second of two albums produced while on tour, “The Life of a Showgirl” is a disappointing era for the singer to step into, for listeners hoping to see something new from Swift. While the composition and melodies are overall successful, the backbone of Swift’s music — her lyricism — is missing from the show.

Gianna’s rating: 2/5

Icon of the Week:

Jane Goodall

Credit **Erik Hersman**

This week, the *Daily*’s icon is the late Jane Goodall, Dame Valerie Jane Morris Goodall. Goodall was born in April 1934 and raised in Hampstead, London. Goodall died on Oct. 1 at the age of 91 after over 60 years of conservation work and global advocacy.

She graduated from Newnham College in Cambridge, London, where she studied ethology, the study of animal behavior. Goodall was the winner of several awards during her scientific career and was known for her work in Africa, studying the communications of chimpanzees, including their social lives and familial structures.

The doctor was regarded as a pioneer in primate research and is the only human to have a chronicled acceptance into chimpanzee society. Her career spanned over six decades of fieldwork and research with primates.

Goodall’s research showed that chimpanzees share many key traits with humans, such as the use of tools, complex emotions, social bonds, organised warfare and passing on knowledge across generations, which changed the traditional view that humans are uniquely different from other animals.

She also established the Jane Goodall Institute in 1977, a global leader in chimpanzee habitat protection and development. A stout activist, Goodall advocated for animal rights and was an environmentalist who was vegan.

Following her death, prominent figures such as members of the United Kingdom royal family, former United States Vice President Al Gore and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau paid tribute to the scientist.

Zara Larsson extends summer season feeling on ‘Midnight Sun’

By Riley Morgan
Staff Writer

For the past decade, Zara Larsson has been an inescapable pillar of dance pop.

With radio classics like “Never Forget You” (2015), mega-viral TikTok sounds like “Symphony” (2017) and certified bangers like “On My Love” (2023), Larsson has been a mainstay in the landscapes of clubs for the last decade.

Now, with the release of her fifth studio album, “Midnight Sun,” Larsson has renewed her title as Swedish pop royalty with her most cohesive and boundary-pushing project to date. The album features 10 tracks and clocks in at just 31 minutes. Despite being the shortest album of her career, it is able to leave a lasting impression far greater than any of her previous releases.

The album opens with the shimmering title track, “Midnight Sun,” which was previously released on June 13. The song blends the electricity of Eurodance with the booming bass of Jersey club, resulting in one of the best dance tracks of the year and marking a high point in Larsson’s discography.

Transitioning from light to dark is the angelic-sounding “Blue Moon,” which features an instrumental chorus reminiscent of the golden age of EDM. The song’s heartfelt lyrics, combined with a strong vocal performance from Larsson, mesh together perfectly to create a track that stands out from the album’s first two singles.

The outro of “Blue Moon” features Larsson saying “let’s get messy” to her longtime producer and collaborator MNEK, before transitioning into the project’s next track, “Pretty Ugly,” which achieves that messiness.

Released on April 25, the album’s lead single, “Pretty Ugly,” is a bold and ambitious track with a chanting chorus and speaker-breaking bass. The song is an autotune masterpiece and a tribute to anyone who likes to be a little messy.

Continuing the messy behavior is the fiery “Girl’s Girl,” which sees Larsson battle between wanting to be a good friend while having feelings for her friend’s partner. The track is an absolute earworm and features some of the album’s best production.

Next is the album’s newest single, “Crush,” which was released on Aug. 15. The track starts as pretty standard until it reaches the bridge, where the song expands into something completely new, leading to a final chorus that pays off in a huge way.

Probably the most unique song on the album, “Eurosummer” is a celebration of summer parties, late-night adventures and just feeling carefree. By switching out synths for

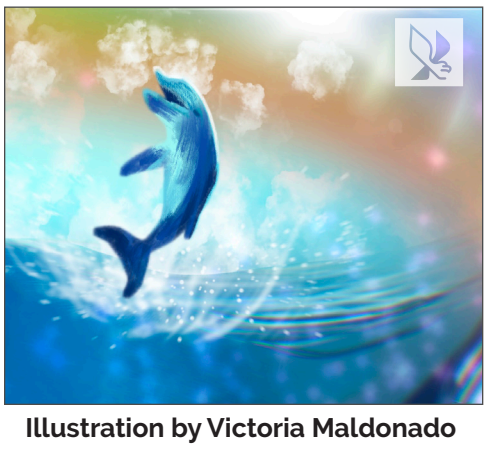


Illustration by Victoria Maldonado

an accordion, the track can feel cohesive with the rest of the album while maintaining its sonic distinctiveness.

Transitioning seamlessly from the previous track is “Hot & Sexy,” a fun and campy song featuring soundbites from Tiffany Pollard’s iconic Celebrity Big Brother UK appearance. The track is a confidence anthem that simultaneously uplifts women while bringing to light the injustices women face in society.

“The Ambition” is the album’s only low point. While its message is sweet, the production falls short and fails to take the song anywhere. The song is partially saved by another good bridge, but it is not enough for the track to reach the peaks of other songs on the album.

The album’s penultimate track, “Saturn’s Return,” is a heartfelt song that explores Larsson’s earlier expectations of fame versus reality. The stripped-down production works much better on this track, and lyrically, it feels like a companion piece to Kacey Musgraves’ “Deeper Well” and Charli xcx’s “I think about it all the time.” It is easily the project’s most thought-provoking track and stands out for that reason.

Ending the album on a bright note is “Puss Puss,” which is named after a Swedish phrase that translates to “kiss kiss.” The track brings back the more maximalist production found in the first half of the album and is the perfect closer to such a fun album.

Even with a fall release date of Sept. 26, Larsson encapsulates the album perfectly on the opening track when she sings “summer isn’t over yet.” From bubbly production to powerhouse vocals, Larsson has crafted a masterclass in dance pop that is undeniably “summer,” yet is bound to be enjoyed in all seasons of the year.

Riley’s rating: 4.5/5

North Texas football takes on No. 24 South Florida in highly anticipated conference clash

PREVIEW

continued from page 1

"[Vailea] was obviously a big piece to our defense and to our defensive line," Jones said. "But we always have a next man up mentality. Those guys behind June, the younger guys, they continue to get reps, they've been getting reps. [...] We're excited to see what those guys can do when they step up and have an opportunity."

Despite losing Vailea and facing a potent South Florida offense, North Texas has the defense to match on paper. They currently rank No. 39 nationally in total defense and are ninth in team passing efficiency on defense.

The Mean Green will also look to continue its trend of formidable offense. Even after the bye week, redshirt freshman quarterback Drew Mestemaker is fifth in the American in passing yards and third in touchdowns. He has not thrown an interception yet this season.

Freshman running back Caleb Hawkins will look to continue his breakout rookie campaign after collecting 331 total yards and seven touchdowns in his last two games. Mestemaker, Hawkins and the rest of the team offense have found their success behind an offensive line that has been one of the best units in the nation.

Following Week 5, they were graded fourth nationally by Pro Football Focus in pass blocking with an 89.3, and 19th in run blocking with an 85.9.

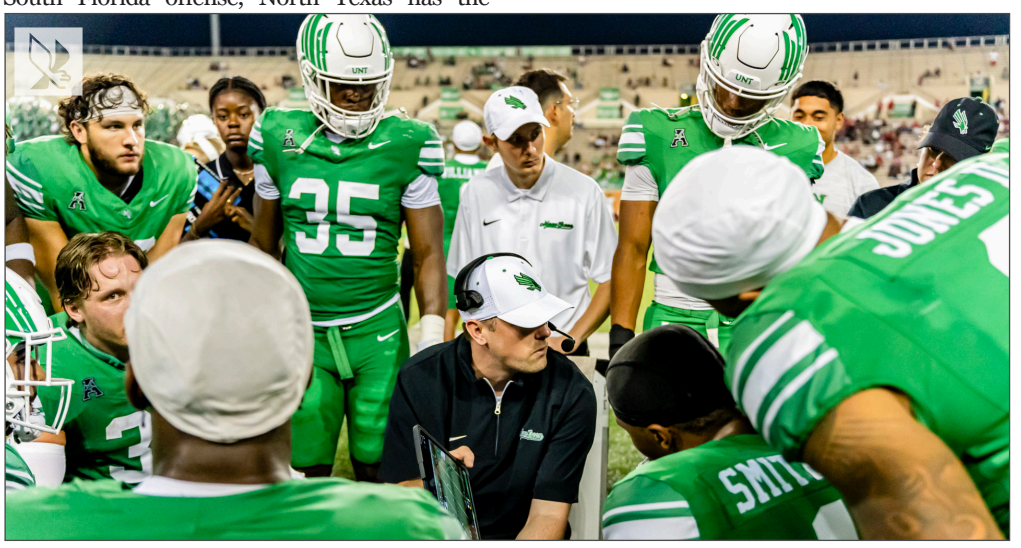
Senior tight end Tre Williams III believes the success can only continue against the Bulls if each player on the offense delivers consistent performances.

"Really just going out there and executing," Williams said. "Caleb and that running back room have been doing really good. Getting that run game established early [...] can open up lanes in the passing game."

A win would grant the team bowl-game eligibility and allow them to join American Conference rival No. 23 Memphis (6-0, 2-0) as the only FBS team with that postseason opportunity at the moment. It would be the quickest the Mean Green have reached bowl eligibility since 1959.

Between the anticipation around the game, the potential records to be set and the matchup between two conference giants, the game is shaping up to be one for the books.

"I told the kids this week, 'We've earned the right for us to be able to be on this stage[...],'" Morris said. "This is what makes it so much fun, I think, for them to be able to play in these moments and find a way."



Defensive coordinator Skyler Cassity (middle) gives the defense instructions against Lamar University at DATCU Stadium on Aug. 30, 2025. **Photo by Trennt Rhea**

Athlete of the Week:

Alina Arneth

Credit **Mean Green Sports**

Junior goalkeeper Alina Arneth took home her second American Conference Goalkeeper of the Week award after her four-save shutout performance against Temple on Oct. 2. Arneth last won the award about a month ago on Sept. 1 after shutting out McNeese State in a 4-0 Mean Green win, and recording four saves in the team's 1-0 loss to the University of Oklahoma. As a transfer from Tennessee's Motlow State Community College, she arrived in Denton this past offseason and initially did not play for North Texas. It was actually in her shutout on Aug. 28 against McNeese that she first debuted for the Mean Green. Thus far this season, Arneth has played the most games out of any goalkeeper on the team, with seven, while sophomore goalkeeper Hicks Bishop is behind her with six.

At a Glance:

Volleyball

Returning home for the first time since their Sept. 28 game, Mean Green volleyball (11-5, 1-3 American) will come back to Denton to play in-state American Conference opponent University of Texas at San Antonio (10-5, 3-1 American). North Texas is currently on a two-game losing streak heading into the matchup, while UTSA has been on a three-game winning streak.

Football

This Oct. 10, North Texas football will play its first ranked opponent in fellow American Conference team No. 24 South Florida (4-1, 1-0 American). It will be the Mean Green's first ranked competition this season and the sixth game amidst the team's undefeated 5-0 start. North Texas (5-0, 1-0 American) enters the game coming off a bye week, while the Bulls will arrive in Denton after a 54-26 demolition of the University of Charlotte at North Carolina (1-4, 0-2 American).

Soccer

The Mean Green soccer team (5-8-1, 1-3-0) will play the University of Tulsa (6-4-4, 1-2-2 American) after earning its first conference win on Oct. 2 against Temple in a 1-0 finish. North Texas earned four American Weekly awards for four separate players for their first conference victory.

COLUMN: South Florida will be the biggest regular-season game on Mean Green's schedule

By Haylie Stum
Senior Sports Writer

It is safe to say this year's North Texas football team has already made history. A 5-0 start to the year stands as the best start since "Mean" Joe Greene, university football legend, was 13 years old in 1959. Based on how the team is performing, the team is on its way to recording its first winning season since 2018.

The race to the finish line does not come without obstacles, however. The bumps in the road may start to come into sight on Friday, Oct. 10, when North Texas plays its home conference opener against No. 24 University of South Florida.

The university officially cancelled classes after 12 p.m. on the Oct. 10 game to increase campus attendance for the historic matchup. The decision's intentions are rightfully placed, as this game makes a case to be the most important regular-season game for the team this season.

Why the most important game is not Navy

It is important to note that the Mean Green will still have a formidable conference foe in the Naval Academy Midshipmen left on their schedule on Nov. 1. Navy is 5-0, has only allowed an average of 20 points per game and currently dominates the ground with an average of over 317 rushing yards per game.

There is no denying North Texas will have its hands full playing them later this year. The matchup, however, may matter less at the conclusion of the regular season. The Midshipmen possess a gauntlet of a schedule in the back-half of the year, taking on No. 16 Notre Dame and No. 23 University of Memphis on the road, along with a date with South Florida sandwiched in between.

With a real possibility that Navy loses all three of those games, beating the Midshipmen may not be as big of an exclamation point on their resume as the Mean Green's meetup with the Bulls.

South Florida does already have a loss, but it is to the No. 2 team in the nation, the University of Miami. The Bulls also have two other wins over top-25 opponents to confirm the team's validity. Navy, on the other hand, has bested three teams with losing records and only have conference opponents to go. Their best-faring opponent is Tulsa, a team currently sitting at 3-2.

Where the South Florida game is placed on the schedule serves as a turning point in the season, with it being the first "crucial" win for the Mean Green in postseason contention. In turn, it will determine how much weight the Navy game carries in the first place.

Path to the playoffs

If someone asked fans a year ago if they thought the Mean Green would have hope for a spot in the 2025 College Football Playoff, the North Texas fanbase would probably have laughed in their face. With a 5-0 record, the concept no longer seems as far out of reach.

The expanded format of the CFP made postseason dreams for mid-major schools a reality starting in the 2024 season. The structure is set up to feature 12 teams, with five of those teams earning automatic bids as the highest-ranked conference champions.

According to CBS Sports, South Florida is a favorite to fulfill that spot. Two ranked wins in as many weeks propelled the Bulls into the national limelight, deeming them the second-highest-ranked G5 team at No. 24 for the time being.

North Texas is not far behind, receiving 16 votes in the Associated Press Top 25 College Football Poll following Week 6. The Mean Green collected two votes in both the AP Top 25 and Coaches polls after their win against the Army Black Knights, the first time since Sept. 23, 2018, and upped their tally after their victory over the South Alabama Jaguars.

What will North Texas gain or lose from the outcome of this game? That is a question the Mean Green faithful want to know the answer to. Unlike potential games later in the season, there is no trophy, no conference title awarded and no automatic guarantee for a ranking or playoff berth. A win only makes North Texas one of three unbeaten teams in the American.

Having said that, the aftermath of Friday night's action will matter more than people realize when evaluating the season — one that has the makings of a program-defining year — in December.

It will serve as a direct test of the lethality of head coach Eric Morris' offense and the extent of the defensive growth. It could be one of arguably two conference wins that build a playoff portfolio. It should allow North Texas to not only jump ahead of the Bulls on the ballot but also inch closer to the top-25 conversation. With two-loss teams still lingering in the ranks, a 6-0 team with an added quality win would be more difficult to keep out.

This is not the first time the Mean Green have experienced this level of hype around regular-season games, sure. In terms of this season, however, this game has earned the right to be the most buzzworthy of 2025.

Junior safety Evan Jackson celebrates on the sideline after an interception against Washington State on Sept. 13, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Education should not be shaped by ideological extremes

By Robert Trevino
Staff Writer

The Texas State Board of Education recently announced it will consider input on social studies standards from David Barton, a conservative Christian activist, before making changes to the state curriculum next summer.

Barton's input on Texas' social science curriculum could lead to the erasure of key civil rights leaders in the state's curriculum and teach children distorted history. Texas children deserve an education that is not filled with ideological falsities, but rather one that teaches them about the many different types of leaders and beliefs.

Instead, Barton is someone who holds no academic credentials in social science, is a prominent evangelical who has married religion and the religious-right ideology with his pseudohistory, now being considered by the state.

Barton's inclusion in advising the curriculum comes at a time of increasing pressure from Christian-advocacy groups. The passage of Senate Bill 10 has already begun to force public schools to display the Ten Commandments. Although 15 families have filed lawsuits against Texas school districts, including Tarrant County, the bill is likely to be upheld.

Barton's appointment only reinforces the notion of instituting Christian principles in schools. He has had a history of doing this type of harm. Barton began his career as a science and math teacher after graduating from Oral Roberts University with a degree in religious studies, but transitioned to religious activism in 1989 with the founding of his organization, WallBuilders.

The goal of WallBuilders is to teach Americans about the "true story of America and our Biblical foundation," according to its website.

He makes feeble arguments to connect social decay to the loss of religion – this includes connecting rising crime rates and declining public schools to the loss of government-sponsored prayer. To help bolster his argument, Barton even wrote his own history books.

The book "Myth of Separation" argues that the separation of church and state is a modern myth. However, historians have heavily criticized the idea and accused Barton of being a pseudohistorian. In fact, he invented quotes from the Founding Fathers while claiming the Constitution's treason clause was a direct quote from the Bible to connect state and church.

His book was so flawed that United States District Judge Neal B. Biggers Jr., appointed by former President Ronald Reagan, ruled that Barton's work was unsuitable for use in public schools.

Barton criticized Cesar Chavez, a Hispanic civil rights leader who advocated for better working conditions for migrant farm workers, as lacking the "stature, impact, and overall contributions of so many others," according to the Texas Tribune.

Barton also argued that Colin Powell, a four-star general in the U.S. Army who was also the first Black National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, was a "weak choice" for representing those who have made "contributions to society in the area of civil rights." He suggested that Truman take his place instead.

Barton's efforts to downplay key historical figures can distort children's view of history. If white men were commended for their civil rights contributions to the same level as minority leaders who led their respective movements, there would be a shift in historical credit. This can lead to an inaccurate, more whitewashed version of history that is only one piece of his ideology.

Barton's influence on social science standards in the state would support his ideology that there should be blurred boundaries between church and state in public education.

He wields his religion as a weapon and, with it, is trying to reframe the meaning of "limited government." Barton argues that there is a "fixed moral law" that is central to the Constitution's framework, and that the "government is ordained by God."

This outlook should be a non-starter for any position involving public schools.

Despite his fringe views and the historical scholars who have shredded his work with claims of "embarrassing factual errors, suspiciously selective quotes, and highly misleading claims," many on the right celebrate Barton and his work.

Mike Huckabee, the current U.S. Ambassador to Israel, called Barton, "maybe the greatest living historian on the spiritual nature of America's early days."

Board member Brandon Hall, who announced Barton's appointment, claims that the "vast majority" of feedback he received is positive.

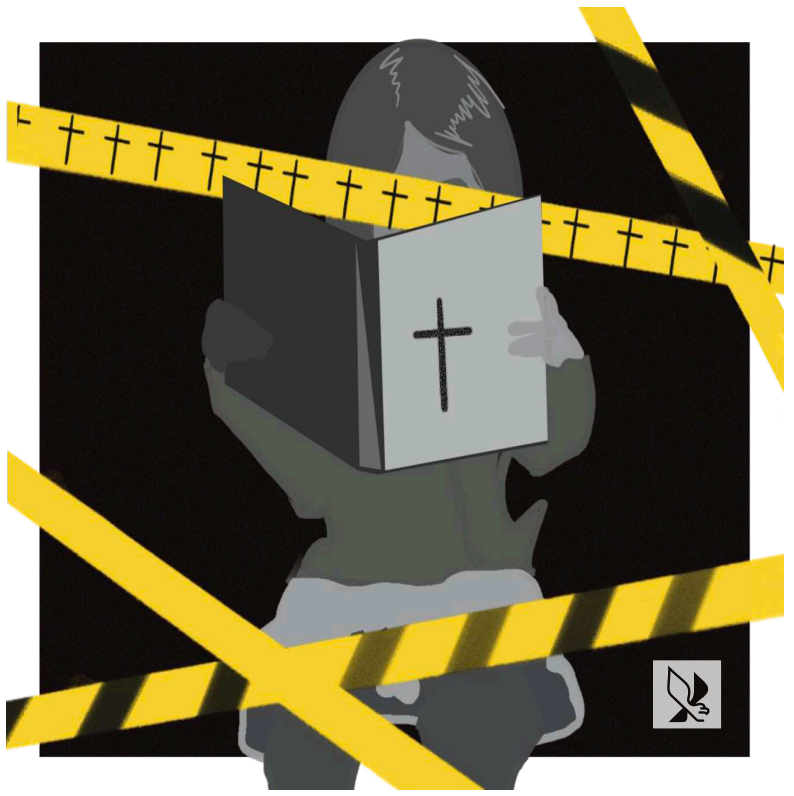


Illustration by Victoria Maldonado

"People are very glad that we're involving David Barton in the process," Hall said.

If these plans are fulfilled, children will be at risk of learning false histories or having the diverse heroes of history diminished and possibly erased from the curriculum altogether.

Educators can help mitigate the impact by serving on local curriculum committees, and parents can meet with their school administrators to provide feedback. They cannot, however, stand alone against these harmful ideas.

Communities must get involved in their local school districts by attending school board meetings and advocating against political attacks against state standardized curriculum. If no changes are made by the communities, then the future of Texas education will continue down a contentious path.

Voucher program will cause harm to already struggling education system

By Kyson Barber
Staff Writer

Senate Bill 2, which allows taxpayer money to be diverted from public schools to private education, is a political choice by Gov. Greg Abbott that will harm an already struggling Texas public education system.

In May, Abbott signed SB 2, which founded the Education Savings Account. The account provides parents with an amount equivalent to 85 percent of the funding a public school would receive per student, using taxpayer dollars to fund private school education for students. This bill disproportionally hurts students with disabilities, marginalized communities, lower-income families and students.

The program, which goes into effect during the 2026-27 school year, has been one of Abbott's main focuses since 2022, and he finally passed it after strong-arm techniques by Political Action Committees, outside billionaires and President Donald Trump.

Abbott claims that the program will give parents more choice and greater control over their students' education. However, it will likely lead to less accessibility, significantly worse public education and segregation of race and class due to private schools historically being known as "segregated academies," according to ProPublica.

The state government funding private school vouchers by using taxpayer money takes away funding from public schools. According to Texas Public Radio, the average school district has approximately $14,000 per student to spend on operating expenses, with smaller districts only having around $11,000.

The lack of funding for public education is already causing severe issues and should not be exacerbated by the voucher program. The Texas public education system is financially struggling, leading to budget deficits, the cutting of programs and less resources for children who need them.

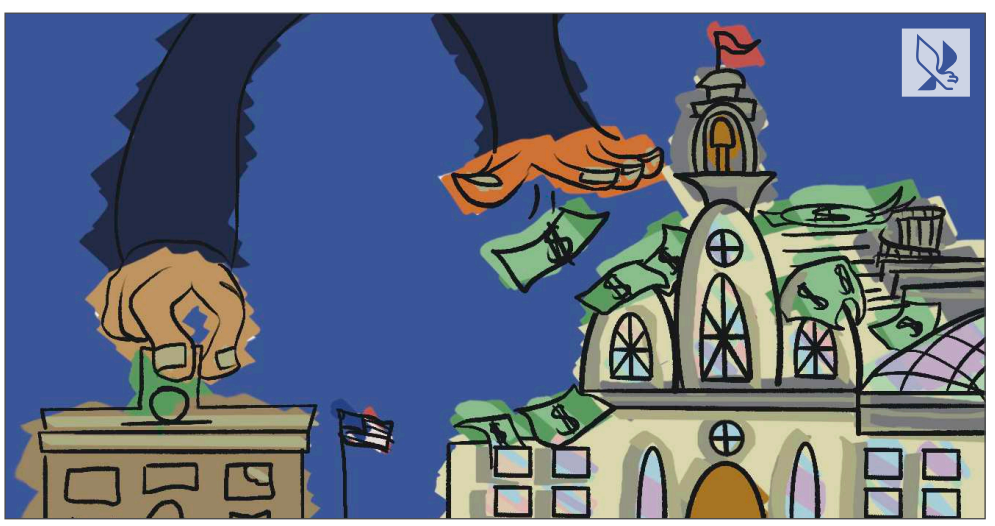


Illustration by Victoria Maldonado and Finn Collins

Private schools, with less oversight and regulation, are also not required to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Private school institutions are not required to provide Individualized Education Programs and do not have to accept students with disabilities in the first place, compared to public schools.

Different schools have different policies, and some private schools accommodate students with disabilities and offer programs tailored to their needs. However, many private schools do not have such programs or lack the comprehensiveness of public schools.

Students with disabilities are not the only ones harmed by the private school vouchers. These policies have consistently and historically hurt marginalized communities.

When private school vouchers were used in previous years, they initially aimed to help lower-income and marginalized individuals afford a better education. This gradually evolved into a means of maintaining school segregation during the civil rights movement of the 1950s.

Marginalized communities historically have not been able to gain access to these private schools because of accessibility, financial reasons and a culture shock that makes it much more difficult for these groups to assimilate into private schools.

Stripping public education funding and allocating it to private school vouchers would create funding issues for programs, extracurricular activities and staff. This has led to the closure of schools that are already overcrowded and underfunded throughout the state.

However, Abbott continues to advocate for private school vouchers because he and his political allies claim vouchers allow for more parental choice and will enable students to receive a better education. This choice, however, is geared towards helping the families that can afford private schooling in the first place.

The claim of a better education is also something people should doubt, as private schools do not have a universal standard for the education of their students and staffing. This leads to unqualified teaching and less-than-adequate education.

Abbott's wife, Cecilia Abbott, could also be a leading reason why he is pushing toward funding private school vouchers. Cecilia Abbott is on the Cathedral School of Saint Mary advisory board and the Blaze School board of directors.

Both schools stand to gain a significant amount of money from the voucher programs. Both the statistics surrounding private school vouchers and the conflicts of interest that influence decision-making regarding these policies are cause for public concern.

These social issues that may arise from private school vouchers will have a detrimental impact on the public school system, affecting schools and the surrounding communities. Teachers, students and administrators will lack adequately funded education.

The need to stay properly informed on this topic is crucial to spreading awareness and advocating for Texas' public school funding.

To alleviate and address the issues facing public education today, Texas taxpayers must stay informed. Texas needs to advocate for its public education by reaching out to state representatives and discussing the social implications associated with the voucher program.

The reversal of these actions is not impossible, but it will require significant public support to maintain the protection of public education in Texas.